The Werewolf

I.
Most mornings, the werewolf insists on making me breakfast before I leave for work, smearing the bloody juice from raw steak on toast. The birds seem to laugh at our bickering when the werewolf proceeds to make me two more soggy slices to take for lunch, shrill chattering coming in through the open windows. I know they just want to feel useful, but the stains take forever to get out of the white porcelain sink; I daydream about stainless steel and dark, speckled granite. I think the coffee-maker breathes at night. I make myself feel better by pretending these are the only reasons we can never invite the neighbors over.

II.
When I turned 20, the werewolf taught me to drive out on the dusty back-roads behind the city. “Slowly, slowly”, they said. I blinked at them from under the red hood and cape they got me years ago as a joke, the one that I have worn every day since. When I was younger, they used to drive so fast that the lights of the city became blurred smears as we whizzed by, all the windows shut tight because we live in one of those places that builds giant liquor stores on the sides of the freeway. I don’t think they listen when I talk about how I hate my father and that I am going to Swallow This House (or maybe it was I Am Going to Swallow My Father and I hate this house) but they’ve definitely memorized the way my 14-year-old voice sounds on the answering machine when I don’t pick up the phone.

III.
Abnormal: deviating from what is normal or usual, typically in a way that is undesirable or worrying.

IV.
I dream that I’m running, heart beating a thump, thump, thump in my throat and ears, blood boiling in the hollows spaces around my bones because I’ve been fed too much silver and it’s not the same as stardust. I keep waking up curled in the middle of my blankets like an animal. I keep my nails short, and force myself to cover my mouth when I feel my lip lifting into a snarl. I sit on
my hands when I want to rip my way out of a too-crowded room. I sneak downstairs in the
middle of the night to yank out the stitches in our family quilt with my teeth. If the werewolf
notices the rusty marks my gums leave on the fabric, we don’t talk about it in the morning.

V.

In the autumn, in the heights of the Orange Harvest Moon, we rake up the crackling, fallen
brown leaves, collect firewood, and make bonfires. It makes the werewolf nervous to chop down
trees, when so many of their nightmares are about all the forests on earth being destroyed,
nowhere left to run, nothing left to rely on. They insist on the smallest branches, on fallen logs,
only squinting when the dampness of the wood smokes in way that makes me cough and choke.
Even with my burning lungs, I understand the need to know of a hiding place; to not feel safe in
a body. This is life as a burning car on the side of the road, as a scuffed polaroid of two teenage
boys kissing at a party, sloppy-scared. Some deadbeat hipster bullshit.

VI.

At my annual physical exam, the doctor laughed at the way my leg jumped with the slightest tap
of her little rubber hammer, marveled at the way she could take apart the bones of my hands and
feet and watch them slide back together on their own, like little magical puzzle pieces. She
smiled and told me how lucky I was not to have claws and a desire to consume warm flesh. The
tendons of my neck were a tightrope walk for the fingers of her right hand; my tongue, a red
carpet for her thumb, the heel of her shoe. My palms became stapled to my thighs, and she said
that if it weren’t for my height, the gentle curve of my waist would look so feminine. I shook
with the effort it took not to mold my mouth to the side of her neck, but to consume is not to
become.

VII.

The werewolf has not killed in 18 years. Every day, I brush their coarse hair, scrub their long,
sharp teeth with a mixture of water and baking soda. They drink coffee, and insist on reading to
me every night by the light of the moon. The stories they pick are always about the old days,
when it was normal to see even the foulest creatures of the Underworld slink out from the
shadows to terrorize the local villagers, until that terror turned to anger and that anger turned to
rage and that rage drove those monsters back to the depths from which they had come. All of this, the werewolf did so that they would still feel strong and beautiful and horrible and mine. And still, I love the dust trails that my tires leave in our grave-dirt driveway.

VIII.

They always complain that my feet pressed to the back of their shins feel like broken china, that after I shower the bathtub looks like some alien crime scene. They’re Hades and I’m Persephone and instead of pomegranate seeds I have swallowed six of my baby teeth. The rest, they wear in a pouch around their neck. Bury me with this, and this, and this. They’ll love me like a tombstone, and all I want is to be tied to the middle of the dinner table while the plates and silverware are set around me.

Sit. Eat. I will stamp the flowers they leave at my feet into dust, every time.